ERIC Document Resume	See Instruction Sheet	DATE OF RESUME 8/17/65	DATE RECEIVED

A. PUBLICATION DATA

1. ERIC NUMBER	2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S).	3. IDENTIFICATION NO.	DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW
ED000569	7320		

4. AUTHOR(S): N.A.

5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED:
Retention of Students in the State Colleges and the University. Joint Staff Study XXIV

6. PUBLICATION TITLE: N.A.

7. EDITOR(S): N.A.

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN
ORG. JSCCHE Rm. 333
ST. Wisconsin Center Bldg.
CITY, STATE 702 Langdon St. Madison, Wis.
TELE. EXT.
INST/LOC CODE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE: Wisconsin. Joint Staff Coordinating Committee for Higher Education

10. VOL.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
N.A.	N.A.	58	

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TYPE OF REPORT
PROPOSAL ☐
IN-PROGRESS ☐
FINAL ☒
FOLLOW-UP ☐

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

B. INDEXING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR: Survey

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

	retention			
students	surveys			
public schools				

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

Purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which students who enter the State colleges and the University of Wisconsin continue their attendance beyond the freshman year. Findings reveal that about one-third of the new freshmen who enrolled in the fall of 1954, 1955, and 1956 did not enroll for the second year—at least in the same college; that there are great differences among the colleges in the number of students retained; and that the retention rate of colleges and universities in Wisconsin is somewhat higher than of other like colleges and universities in the United States.

ERIC No.

18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT

C. FUNDING DATA

19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION	20. DIVISION OR DEPT.	21. CONTRACT NO. / PROJECT NO.
	22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT	
	23. DURATION OF PROJECT	U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Education

ERIC Form 1

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
Office of Education

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IV-21

RETENTION OF STUDENTS
IN
THE STATE COLLEGES AND THE UNIVERSITY

Prepared for the

Coordinating Committee for Higher Education

in Wisconsin

Wisconsin Joint Staff Study XXIV

September, 1958

ED000569

RETENTION OF STUDENTS
IN
THE STATE COLLEGES AND THE UNIVERSITY

PURPOSE. The purpose of this study was to learn the extent to which students who enter the State Colleges and the University continue their attendance beyond the freshman year.

PROCEDURE. During the Spring term, 1957, the registrars of the state colleges and the University provided the following information:

(a) The number of new freshmen who enrolled in each of the Fall terms of 1954, 1955, 1956.

(b) The number from each of these groups who were enrolled in the Spring term, 1958.

The per cent of each entering group which was enrolled in the Spring term of 1958 was computed for each school. This showed the retention of entering students one year, two years, and three years after their original enrollment.

Retention of the students who entered in the three years combined was also computed.

RESULTS. The analysis of the information is shown in the following table.

TABLE 1. NUMBER AND PER CENT OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN SPRING TERM, 1958 FROM ENTERING FRESHMEN OF 1954, 1955, AND 1956.

SCHOOL	1954			1955			1956			TOTAL		
STATE COLLEGES	E[1]	R[2]	%	E[1]	R[2]	%	E[1]	R[2]	%	E[1]	R[2]	%
Eau Claire	520	132	25	559	178	32	543	260	49	1622	582	36
La Crosse	463	189	41	507	223	44	513	342	67	1483	833	56
Oshkosh	294	148	50	455	271	59	513	361	70	1262	810	64
Platteville	304	244	80	307	273	89	373	256	69	984	773	78
River Falls	341	109	32	400	115	29	439	259	59	1180	683	52
Stevens Point	380	104	27	470	146	31	475	265	56	1325	515	39
Stout	278	180	65	338	232	68	341	242	71	957	654	68
Superior	275	98	36	~~346~~ 345	132	54	294	199	68	~~915~~ 913	439	~~48~~ 57
Whitewater	360	107	30	423	171	40	466	272	58	1249	550	44
Wis. Inst.	57	30	53	74	44	59	69	54	78	~~200~~	131	65
TOTAL	3272	1341	41	~~3879~~ 3379	1785	46	4026	2510	62	~~11108~~ 11008	5761	52
U.W. (Madison)	2470	1258	51	2636	1438	55	2660	1736	65	7766	4432	57
U.W. - Milwaukee	1119	279	25	1413	421	29	1438	678	47	3970	1378	35

[1]E = No. of entering freshmen in that year.

[2]R = No. of entering freshmen of that year who were still enrolled in the Spring term, 1958.

3 = The total column includes students who had graduated earlier or had not made year by year progress in their studies.

DISCUSSION. In general, slightly more than one-half of the students entering state-supported colleges have continued attendance in those colleges through three school years.

About one-third of the entering freshmen do not re-enroll for the second year -- at least in the same college.

There are extraordinary differences among the colleges in the number of students retained. The Platteville State College, Wisconsin Institute of Technology, and Stout State College retain considerably larger per cents of their students than do any other units of the state-supported colleges and the University. Oshkosh and La Crosse State Colleges also show consistently higher than average rates of retention. There is nothing in the data which accounts for the differences. In general, students who are in courses with specific occupational objectives tend to persist in their studies at a higher rate. Differences in scholastic abilities of students or in scholastic standards of the several schools could be operating. Variations in economic conditions among the communities might cause differences in drop-outs. Some schools may have consistently higher numbers of students who transfer to other schools.

The retention rate of the University (Madison campus) is higher than the state colleges, particularly after the first year of attendance.

The very low retention rate of the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee reflects the fact that the entering freshmen in 1955 were divided between those entering the two year extension division plus those entering Milwaukee State College. The extension division students have shown a high rate of transfer to the Madison campus for courses not available at U. W. - Milwaukee -- e.g. Engineering, Commerce, et al.

In comparison with other like colleges and universities in the U. S., the retention rate of Wisconsin's colleges and universities is somewhat higher. A national study showed a retention rate of 52.1% for universities and 44.6% for teachers colleges, and 50.6% for liberal arts colleges.